



ROYAL ARMOURD CORPS MEMORIAL TRUST
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VJ Day - Lest We Forget

It seems like it was so long ago and so far away. The whole history of the Burma campaign has become warped and distorted over time by arguments about Britain's role in the world, the demise of the Empire, as well as more recent internal civil unrest.

However, for the men that fought and died in the jungles of the Arakan, on the slopes of Kohima, or amongst the bunkers of Meiktila, it was all too very real at the time. They just got on with a job that had to be done, but at great personal sacrifice a long way from home.

The steep and jungle clad hills of Burma could never be described as tank country, but the Royal Armoured Corps nevertheless played a vital role. Equipped mainly with Stuarts, M3 Lee and M3 Grant tanks (essentially cast-offs, regarded as obsolete for the European war), many of the armoured units were formed at short notice by re-rolling infantry battalions.



For instance, in 1941, 146th Regiment, Royal Armoured Corps, was formed from 9th Duke of Wellington's Regiment, equipped originally with Valentines and then M3s. They served with distinction wearing their original cap badge on a black "tankie" beret. They soldiered in India, Burma and Sumatra until the regiment was disbanded in 1947. Captain Sir Tom Moore, who became a national hero, served with distinction in this unit throughout this campaign.

However, both the traditional British cavalry and the Royal Tank Regiment also served alongside their Indian cavalry brothers in arms. One notable unit was the 3rd Carabiniers (The Prince of Wales' Dragoon Guards), who were serving in India at the outbreak of war.

Equipped with M3 Lee medium tanks, they played a vital role in halting the Japanese advance on India at the Battle of Imphal, losing no less than 11 men in one day at Potsambang on 8 May 1944 . One of these, Tpr George Burgess, of Fulham in London, was just 19 years old.

Operating normally at Squadron or even just Troop level, the “3rd Carbs” remained in the midst of the fighting right through the recapture of Burma, engaged in ferocious close quarter engagements against a formidable and resolute enemy every track mile of the road to Mandalay and the Irrawaddy.



The rigours that those crewmen endured, keeping their vehicles roadworthy despite a severe shortage of spares, fighting the heat, the jungle and the monsoon as well as the tenacious Japanese, is difficult to comprehend at this distance of time and space. The scale of their sacrifice is perhaps best understood by studying the Royal Armoured Corp’s Roll of Honour, on display in our Memorial Room at The Tank Museum. The RAC Roll of Honour records 90 members of the 3rd Carabiniers who lost their lives during the Burma campaign.



In fact, on just one day, 5 May 1945, when German forces were surrendering to Field Marshal Montgomery on Lunenburg Heath, no less than 6 members of 3rd Carabiniers were killed as Slim’s 14th Army fought its way into Rangoon. As Britain was celebrating the end of the war in Europe, these men were still fighting and dying in this distant corner of the Empire.

As a new war again ravages the beautiful country of Myanmar, it is only right that we do stop and remember those who fought to free the country of Japanese occupation 80 years ago. They may have considered themselves “The Forgotten Army”, but we shall never forget their sacrifice. Their bodies now lie at peace in a foreign land, carefully tended by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. To them we owe a great debt of gratitude for continuing to care for our Royal Armoured Corps brethren in such a respectful and loving manner.



The Rangoon War Cemetery

Let our Nation never forget the words that are engraved into the Kohima Memorial:

"When you go home, tell them of us and say, For your tomorrow, we gave our today"



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